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The Tourist with a Hidden Agenda? Shifting Roles in the Field of Tourism Research

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the way tourism researchers have to shift between different roles when in the field. The complex reality of the tourism arena with its multidisciplinary character requires a certain flexibility when it comes to the approach and perspective used by the researcher when interacting with the actors in the field. This role switching and flexibility has certain consequences when it comes to the position of the researcher. Furthermore, contemporary developments in the world (such as globalisation, technological developments and increased human mobility) have altered the practice of ethnographic research. The article explores and reflects upon some of the (methodological) issues that tourism researcher are confronted with when conducting ethnographic research, by discussing a number of empirical examples from different researchers in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Studies in the field of tourism are traditionally dominated by (positivist) business-oriented approaches. It was not until the 1960s that the first anthropological and sociological studies were conducted (Crick, 1989). Even after that it seemed that the tourism arena was not very appealing to anthropologists and other social scientists, in view of the few accounts in the literature. Despite the fact that positivist approaches to tourism studies still dominate in the relevant publications, in the past few decades there seem to be an increasing number of sociological, anthropological and social psychological approaches to tourism (Riley and Love, 2000), which study the field from an interpretive paradigm. Rather than looking for systematic patterns and focusing on statistical data, these studies aim to understand the social world in its own context. Such interpretive approaches focus on the complex local processes and cultural phenomena within the social context of the actors involved. The researcher aims to include the multiple voices present in the field in a critical and reflexive manner, while aiming at understanding the processes of sense making and the shared experiences of the research subjects (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Such ethnographic approaches in particular involve the 'close study over time using participation and observation, of a group of people, with the emphasis on obtaining the insider view' (O'Reilly, 2005).

Traditionally, ethnographic studies have developed as the method used by anthropologists to study remote cultures in a holistic way. Classic examples are the studies by early researchers such as Malinowski (1922). These

studies offered convincing accounts by presenting 'authentic' understandings of the rich complexity of such cultures, by spending an extended period of time among the members of this culture in order to understand the daily life of these people, from an emic (insider) perspective, as opposed to other types of research that try to grasp the specifics of a social setting by keeping a distance and observe from an etic (outsider) point of view (e.g. Lett, 1990). Nevertheless these early ethnographic studies have later received much criticism for claiming to present cultures as they really are. Social constructivists, following Berger and Luckmann (1966), have increasingly questioned the objectivist or realist approach to culture by claiming that any knowledge is subjective and shaped by the individual's previous knowledge and world view. Rather than presenting ethnographies as 'true' it has come to be recognised that such accounts are interpretations from the researcher.

Thus, contemporary ethnographers need to be reflexive and critical when it comes to presenting their data. Furthermore when it comes to ethnographic studies, 'the emphasis on holistic description has given way to more focussed and bounded studies of particular topics of interest' (Hine, 2000, p. 41). Ethnographers or anthropologists no longer aim to travel to an exotic culture and describe every aspect of this culture's life. Instead, specific social and cultural phenomena in distant as well as nearby settings lie at the basis of contemporary ethnographic research. As such, ethnography is increasingly used as a method to study tourism related issues.

However, it is claimed by some that conventional ethnographic methods are no longer appropriate for the studying of contemporary cultural phenomena (e.g. Marcus, 1995; Hine, 2000; Hannerz, 2003). According to them, current developments such as globalisation, technological developments and the growth of human mobility across the globe call for different approaches to research and methods. Such developments have important consequences for the application of traditional research methods and the position of the researcher. This article aims to explore some of the methodological, as well as ontological and epistemological issues related to the application of ethnographic methods in the field of tourism. Central to this discussion is the changing role(s) of the researcher in the field.

THE ROLE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHER

With the rise of ethnographic studies in the field of tourism research, the role of the researcher is increasingly becoming a point of discussion among scholars (e.g. Bruner, 1995; Crick, 1995; Phillimore and Goodson, 2004). Recognising the subjectivity of the researcher and the importance of the context of social science research is the first step in understanding the dynamics of researcher–object relations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The contemporary discussion between constructivists and (critical) realists on the nature of reality and how to study it has increasingly received attention in the field of tourism as well as in other fields of social research (e.g. Botteril, 2001; Hollinshead, 2004a). The ontological and epistemological questions that lie at the heart of this discussion call for a careful deliberation on the part of the researcher. Hollinshead (204b, p. 84) argues that such deliberations are especially important in tourism studies owing to the 'broad range of different values which are influential in local and global scenarios'. Central to such deliberations is the role of the researcher in relation to the field.

As both Bruner (1995) and Crick (1995) have pointed out, researchers in tourism have to take into account the specific tourism context of the field. When an anthropologist travels to a place to conduct fieldwork, especially in developing countries, they are likely to be identified as tourist by both locals and other tourists. And in a sense they are tourists, even though they will be reluctant to admit this; both tourists and anthropologists travel to unknown places to find a certain experience. However, in the case of tourism research this can lead to rather confusing situations. Crick (1995) argues that there is a certain overlap in identities between anthropologists and tourists in the field. Both travel to (exotic) places to have a certain experience and then go home to tell about it. Anywhere anthropologists might go to gather data he/she is likely to encounter tourists (Crick, 1995). The researcher becomes part of the subject of the

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research and, to a further extent than in any other situation, they are integrated in the field. Bruner (1995) describes the difficulties he encountered while doing research about tourists. He found that he was sometimes acting the same as any other tourist, but at other times observing and studying the behaviour of the tourists from the outside. In the end he felt as if he was studying himself (Bruner, 1995, p. 231). This leads to an ambiguous position for the researcher with regard to the emic/etic debate, on the one hand he/she is part of the field and thus an insider (emic) but at the same time he/she needs to keep a certain distance to be able to study other aspects of the setting (thus taking on an etic perspective).

Furthermore, Roessingh and Duijnhoven (2004) have argued that the nature of the tourism arena makes it difficult for the researcher to witness the 'backstage behaviour' (Goffman, 1959) of the actors in the field, for they are being identified as tourists and therefore the actors will treat them as such, thus displaying their 'frontstage behaviour' (Roessingh and Duijnhoven, 2004). As Van den Berghe (1994) puts it: 'When I am studying tourism as an anthropologist, I may look like a tourist — that is, I may blend in quite well as a participant observer — but I am not really a tourist, because I have an ulterior motive beyond simply being there for its own sake' (Van den Berghe, 1994, p. 5). The identification with the label 'tourist' seems to have negative connotations. Most people do not feel comfortable with the label; they rather see themselves as 'travellers' or 'adventurers'. Thus it can be said that there is a difference between the categorisation by the people themselves and by others (Van den Berghe, 1994). In that sense Crick (1995, p. 205) wonders, 'in what ways is the anthropologist studying tourism like or unlike the tourists being studied?' In other words, what makes someone a tourist? The label given to them by themselves, or that given by others?

According to social constructivists, the relationships between actors in a social setting are fluid. They are based on shared systems of meaning. Thus the label 'tourist' is dependent upon intersubjective understanding and the boundaries between people in the field are dynamic and constantly shifting (Sherif, 2001). For the tourism researcher, the ambiguous character of his/her position in the field further complicates the already complicated task of studying a socially constructed reality. How do researchers handle these complexities? When do they act as 'regular tourists'? In which situations are they inclined to open up about the research they are conducting? These and other questions will be addressed here. How do ethnographers in the field of tourism go about shifting between different roles and what are the consequences for their own identity and the research data? What kind of challenges is an ethnographer in tourism confronted with and how does this affect his/her position as a researcher?

This article will continue with a discussion of a number of these issues. Elaborating these issues, examples from different researchers in the field of tourism are used to explore the complexities that researchers are confronted with when preparing for, conducting and analysing their research. The examples are taken from both previous studies, as well as from research notes of several anthropologists that have conducted fieldwork on tourism. Following the empirical examples, the article will end with a conclusion regarding the dynamic relations between the field, the research and the identity of the researcher.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

It has become clear from the above that the distinction between a researcher and a tourist is rather ambiguous. Especially when western researchers conduct their research in third-world destinations, they are almost naturally perceived as tourists themselves. In addition, they often participate in tourist activities, along with 'regular' tourists, while observing the situation and interactions. As a consequence, the researcher has an almost natural access to the study site. As Bras (2000, p. 12) puts it: 'Taking on the tourist role was an ideal way to visit the most important sites on the island, and to become acquainted with the alternative routes across Lombok'. Participant observation is one of the most important methods for anthropological research and it 'is peculiarly well suited to a study of tourism'

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(Van den Berghe, 1994, p. 29) because it is relatively easy to blend in, unlike in many other research settings. Van den Berghe (1994, p. 32) even suggests that with the study of tourism he might have: 'discovered anthropological Nirvana, by becoming one with my subject, the anthropologist cum tourist. In the end, what is anthropology but the ultimate form of ethnic tourism, the endless quest for self-understanding through the exotic other?' Crick (1995) takes this argument even further, suggesting that, despite the fact that most anthropologists resent being displayed as tourists because they see themselves as more knowledgeable or even superior to mere tourists, in fact there is little difference between the two:

> Tourists are essentially strangers temporarily residing in other cultures; they are normally more affluent than those among whom they stay; they have quite circumscribed interests in the other, interests which are formed in advance and which derive from their own culture; they are awkward and essentially marginal while in the field, and communicate less than effectively; they use their economic resources to obtain the experiences and relationships they value; not 'belonging' in a fundamental sense, they are free to leave at any time; on returning home they re-establish their more permanent identity and relate their experiences, enhancing their status with every telling. All these traits, it is contended, characterize anthropologists (Crick, 1995, p. 212).

Thus, by nature, the anthropologist conducting fieldwork will be looked upon as and act similar to the tourists. This can have advantages in the process of data collection. Taking on the tourist role legitimises interactions with actors in the field and provides the researcher with the possibility to move around freely in the field (Bras, 2000). Nevertheless this easy access remains rather superficial, which is characteristic for most interactions within the tourism arena. Like any type of research that takes place in public settings, initial access might be easily obtained, but this access remains confined to typical frontstage interactions (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

To gain a more profound insight of the social construction of the field and the relationships between different actors, further access is necessary. In order to gain this access, researchers need to be able to take on a number of different roles besides that of a 'normal' tourist or researcher and they have to use different strategies (Bras, 2000, p. 17). One of these strategies is language. To be able as a researcher to understand the local language in a setting proves to be essential for observations on the backstage of the field, as will become clear in the following example.

In this example an anthropologist, conducting fieldwork in the Dominican Republic, was travelling from one Dominican town to another in a local bus, a *gua-gua*. This mode of public transportation is used only occasionally by tourists, who are attracted by the low prices. Most tourists, however, would rather use a taxi because the overcrowded, old buses may seem very uncomfortable and even unsafe according to their (western) standards. Most of these vehicles are without proper seats and windows, and it happens often that people are hanging on the sides of the bus due to lack of room inside.

Example 1

When I got on the *gua-gua* the bus was already very crowded, nevertheless I was able to obtain a seat in the back of the vehicle. Although there were about 15 seats, at one point during the ride there were more than 25 people on board. I was sitting quietly in the back, in between a young woman with a baby on her lap and an elder woman. During the trip the people around me were complaining about the prices that had gone up and the fact that they had to pay a double fare due to the holiday-season. The old lady next to me in particular seemed very angry and frustrated. When the *gua-gua* stopped at the front gate of a luxury tourist resort to let in four tourists (a family with two small children), a few locals offered their space and seats to the tourists and hung out of the *gua-gua*, while the vehicle continued its way. This further angered the lady and some other locals in

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the back. The woman was going on and on about how the tourists were spoiling everything for the locals these days, causing prices to rise and taking their places on the local buses. Why don't they take a taxi, they have money enough. She looked very angry at the tourists and also at me (I figured she, naturally, thought of me as a tourist as well). The tourist family in the front of the *gua-gua* could not hear the lady but I, for I was sitting next to her, was within hearing-range. The lady clearly did not expect me to be able to understand a word of what she was saying, let alone that I was in fact not a (regular) tourist but an anthropologist taking note of her every word and gesture.

This fragment is based on the research of Hanneke Duijnhoven (2004)

The researcher in the example is categorized as just another tourist. The region is a popular tourist destination and tourists are present in most public spaces. The woman in the example obviously feels threatened by the presence of the tourists; they had invaded a place that was supposed to be for locals only, according to her. This symbolises the enormous influence the tourism industry has on the daily life of the locals. Not only are the many tourists in the area changing her daily life, they had trespassed into the backstage area where she thought she was 'safe' from tourists and where she should be able to behave as usual and live her 'regular' life. Furthermore, due to the fact that in general the tourists that come to the Dominican Republic do not speak or understand Spanish, she did not think any of the tourists that were present could understand what she was saying, thus she felt free to express her true feelings.

The aforementioned situation is exemplary of what Goffman (1959) calls frontstage and backstage areas. Ideally the frontstage is where the performers (in this case the locals) act in a way they want the audience (the tourists) to think is their 'normal behaviour', whereas on the backstage they can express their 'true feelings' because the audience is absent (Goffman, 1959). In the case of tourism these backstage regions are places where the hosts can freely utter their frustrations. These regions include the local residential areas, backyards, local restaurants and other public places where tourists are not often seen. It has to be noted, however, that it lies in the nature of tourists to try to enter into these back regions to get a taste of the 'authentic' local life (Boissevain, 1996, p. 8), thereby transforming the frontstage into the backstage. This is also the case in the above-mentioned example. The woman in the *gua-gua* thinks she is in the backstage area, but in fact the researcher is able to observe her backstage behaviour and transforming, so to speak, the backstage into a frontstage area. In situations like this, because as a researcher it is necessary to understand the language of the locals, researchers are able to observe and understand the 'real' opinions of the informants, while these locals see the researcher as a tourist and therefore assume that they cannot overhear or understand what they are saying.

In this example, the researcher was able to use a tourist role to gather valuable data that would have been extremely difficult to obtain without this easy disguise. Nevertheless in some situations the tourist role is not the best one to gain access. In some situations other strategies need to be used in order to obtain access. In the following example the researcher's ethnic background played an important role in the research. This researcher was able to build relationships of trust with her respondents based on ethnic similarities.

Example 2

The research took place in Paramaribo, the capital of Surinam. The researcher conducted the research in cooperation with a national tourism association. This association is closely linked to the Government and activities carried out from this organisation are generally received with suspicion among locals. The researcher's connection with this organisation, combined with her Dutch nationality would initially lead to suspicious reactions from locals; they naturally thought she was working for the Government, against them. However, when she

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would tell them that her family descends from the Carib Indians (who represent one of the ethnic groups in Surinam), their attitude usually changed immediately. In spite of her Dutch nationality, her ethnic background aroused feelings of solidarity: the common background convinced the locals that she could only have their interests at heart. She was able to build a broad and stable network of respondents and she managed to integrate to a certain extend with the local population due to her ethnicity. She was still looked upon as a tourist, and in that sense she remained an outsider at all times, but the ethnic similarities caused a mutual feeling of trust and loyalty, which helped her with her research.

This fragment is based on the research of Gwendolyn de Boer (2003).

The researcher in this example could use her ethnic identity to gain the trust of her informants. Because she has a similar ethnic background, the informants naturally expected her to be loyal to them and their community. Thus the researcher was able to strategically use her ethnic identity in order to approach her informants. This strategic usage of specific aspects of one's identity is often indicated in theories regarding identity and ethnicity (e.g. Baud *et al.*, 1994; Jenkins, 1997; Cohen, 2000). Yet despite the ethnic bond between the researcher and the community she was not able to fully integrate in the community. She remained an outsider. This is inherently part of conducting research. A researcher in the field always has a special position due to his or her role. Through the different roles and usage of identity he or she is able to move around in the field and adapt his/her act to the specific situations, in order to gather the necessary data. Sometimes, however, there are certain restrictions, which make it extremely difficult for the researcher to gain access to the field. In those instances the researcher might be forced to observe from a distance or to move in the margins of the field, as will become clear in the next example, based on another researcher's experiences when conducting fieldwork in Cuba.

Example 3

This researcher found herself in a dangerous position because as an anthropologist she was going to study the interactions between Cubans and tourists, interactions that are included on the 'list of forbidden activities'. The Cuban Government actively tries to reduce these contacts as much as possible. Moreover she did not have a legal license to conduct research of this kind. Therefore, according to a key informant, the researcher would be in serious trouble if the authorities would find out that she was illegally conducting research on a tourist visa. She would have to seriously consider sending her data to someone back home and deleting it from her laptop before going home. This informant also warned her that anyone could betray her, so she would have to be careful whom she would reveal her intentions to. She would spend a lot of time on her balcony, observing — or as one of the informants called it: spying — the interactions on the street in front of her house. According to this researcher, the balcony symbolised her feelings of imprisonment and safety at the same time. On the one hand she felt detained because she could not go out and do what she wanted. On the other hand she felt safe when at home or at the balcony for here she could be herself: a researcher. The field she was studying — tourism — offered her the perfect alibi; she could go out and pretend to be a tourist while observing everything. Still she struggled with feelings of guilt because she was spying and endangering the people who helped her.

This fragment is based on the research of Kim van Haaster (2004).

Clearly the local (political) context can have an important influence on the position of the researcher. In the example above, the researcher is forced into a certain role. Combined with the risks involved with the research this has had a significant impact on the personal feelings of the researcher. She had to be careful not to reveal her actual purpose of

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being in the field (namely research). There has been substantial debate among scholars as to whether or not covert research is acceptable as a research practice (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Flick, 2002; O'Reilly, 2005). In all situations it is important for researchers to think carefully about and reflect upon the possible effect the research can have on the participant involved (O'Reilly, 2005).

Another strategy to gain access to the field is through initial contacts with gatekeepers or key-informants. In most situations where access needs to be negotiated certain gatekeepers need to be convinced of the importance of the research. It is therefore necessary to (partly) reveal the researcher's professional objectives. Usually a researcher will use the network of contacts they have initially made. However, these gatekeepers or key-informants will inevitably shape and influence the development of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 74–75), as will become clear in the fourth example, where a researcher gained access to the study site in Surinam through contacts with an official tourism association.

Example 4

The researcher found that there was a clear distinction between people within the Galibi (a small town in Surinam) community that are involved with tourism, and those who are not involved. In general the people that are involved in the tourism industry have a positive view of the development of this industry. They see many benefits for the community. The people that are not involved, on the other hand, tend to have a more negative attitude towards tourism and tourists. They often feel as if the tourists have no respect for their traditions and way of life and they see the tourism industry as something that destroys their community. The researcher was able to conduct her research within this community through contacts with Stinasu (an official organisation involved with tourism). They introduced her to the head of the town, who introduced her to the people of the town. However, her initial connection with Stinasu inflicted some suspicion among the locals, especially those that were not involved in tourism. During her stay, the conflicts between the 'pro-tourism' locals and 'anti-tourism' locals led to a number of disputes. Her position in the community, as a tourism researcher, made it difficult for her to interact with the locals that were against tourism development, and she found it hard to integrate in the community. Despite her attempts to convince the locals of her objective position as a researcher, the problems within the community invigorated the distant attitude of the locals towards her.

This fragment is based on the research of Lizzy Beekman (2005).

It follows from this example that a researcher needs to be conscious about the relations and dynamics among all actors in the field. Who provides the access to the field and what are their relations with other actors in the field? In this case, access was gained through contacts with people in the area's tourism industry. The final word, however, was by the head of the town, the gatekeeper of this research field. The question is if such key-informants have the right to act as a gatekeeper and decide to give access to a researcher on behalf of the whole community, even when others might not agree or feel offended by the presence of this researcher? In this respect, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) talk about 'obstructive' and 'facilitating relationships'. In all ethnographic field research, the relationships with the gatekeepers and key-informants influence to a certain extent the research and the boundaries of access. '. . . the ethnographer will be channelled in line with existing networks of friendship and enmity, territory and equivalent "boundaries"' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p. 75). The researcher in this example was torn between two groups of people in the community. To be able to live in the community she had to reveal her position as a researcher. She was associated with the tourism industry and thereby became a part of the group of people that favour the development of tourism. This consequently led to the

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fact that she was distrusted by another group of people. For all researchers conducting fieldwork, it is essential to pay attention to the local dynamics of power, interests and conflicts, because these can have serious implications for the position of the researcher and the research. What is more, such power relations can lead to researcher bias (Belsky, 2004) or the researcher can become a sort of tool in existing (power) conflicts. Thus it is necessary to keep these relations in mind and to reflect upon them.

The researcher in example 4 clearly has a less legitimate role in the field than the researchers in examples 1, 2 and 3. The community where this research took place has, until recently, lived rather isolated from the outside world. The community is a newly developed tourist destination and there is an internal debate among the locals as to whether this business is acceptable or not. The introduction of the tourism industry in this community has given rise to strong reaction from certain groups within the community aimed at the conservation of their traditional culture (Beekman, 2005). In areas where tourism has experienced a longer development, such reactions might still be present, however, the presence of tourists is much more common there (e.g. Duijnhoven and Roessingh, 2005). They take part in everyday life in those areas and their roles are in a sense (intersubjectively) attached to those settings, whereas in this example, the position of the researcher much more resembles the traditional 'outsider' position of the classic ethnographer.

This is not to say that there remains no distinction between hosts and guests or that the increase in travel as one of the central globalising forces in our contemporary world will result in a homogeneous global culture. It merely indicates that ethnographic practices are increasingly 'grounded in connection, in relation, and in the global dynamics of the world — also a small place' (Dolby, 2003, p. 59). The position of the researcher as an inextricable part of the setting he/she studies requires much more subtle sensitivity to the historical cultural norms and values that are embedded in the local setting. Although the boundaries between insiders and outsiders seem to be blurred, on the backstage of the local setting the ethnographer still remains an outsider. The fact that 'strangers' are part of the local dynamics only increases the risk of insensitivity to the local cultural values on behalf of the ethnographer, as the next example will show. In this fragment the researcher participated in the festivities regarding an ethnic holiday of the Garinagu in Belize; the Garifuna settlement day.

Example 5

The celebration of this ethnic holiday primarily serves as a means to increase or strengthen the feeling of community or ethnic identity among the Garinagu and to be acknowledged as an ethnic group by the government and the rest of the country. Besides that, nowadays the holiday has three strategic purposes from the perspective of the Government of Belize that aims to make the country attractive for tourists. In the first place, these ethnic festivities are used to attract tourists. In the second place, local Garifuna entrepreneurs are able to sell ethnic merchandise to these tourists, thus it is used to increase their business opportunities. Finally, the holiday is displayed as a good opportunity for tourists to learn about the Garifuna culture and traditions (Roessingh and Bras, 2003). For the researcher the holiday was a good opportunity to interact on a different basis with members of this ethnic group. He had no problems gaining access to the festivities because, as it was stated, the manifestations are also open for tourists. However, because of his previous contacts among the Garinagu, the researcher was able to integrate more profoundly within the community during this celebration. The people were more open and informal due to the festive character of the day. The researcher interacted with the locals in a different, more informal and less sensible way. Initially, it seemed as if the distinction between him and the locals, partly due to alcohol consumption, became less clear. The relation between the researcher and the locals changed within the context of this festival. The problem was that during the festival these new roles seemed appropriate, but the

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next day, when the situation was supposed to be normal again, these new roles suddenly seemed very awkward. Some kind of (emotional) boundary had been crossed and from that moment the researcher had to fight to be able to restore and maintain his previous contacts among this group.

This fragment is based on the research of Carel Roessingh (2001).

A situation like the ethnic holiday in this fragment might appear to be a great opportunity to see a different side of the community, however, there is a risk involved. Due to the festive character of the moment, a researcher might feel very comfortable to open up to his respondents and display certain behaviour without regarding cultural boundaries of accepted behaviour. Especially when the researcher has established certain level of trust with the local community this can have serious consequences for the future relations. When something like this happens to tourists, they can leave and move on because their relationship with this ethnic group has no special meaning to them. Yet, a researcher cannot permit to put his or her position within the community on the line because he/she runs the risk of losing his or her credibility, while the researcher is dependant on contacts among the locals to conduct the research. Thus the researcher needs to be careful during this kind of situation not to become comfortable or to cross a line because the future of his/her research is at stake. Researchers need to be sensitive to the embedded cultural norms and values and find a balance between integrating in and keeping a distance from the local community.

In the preceding five examples a number of issues regarding the position and roles of researcher in the field of tourism have been elaborated. It became clear that researchers are able to, and sometimes they are even forced to, shift between different roles and to use different strategies during the fieldwork in order to gain access to relevant data. However, there is a certain risk involved with this shifting between different roles and strategies, because it can lead to questions and discussions among other actors in the field or even damage the relation with other actors. Initially a researcher might be seen as 'just a tourist' and get away with that, but after a while locals might wonder about the researchers activities. They might not be able to explain his/her behaviour and therefore not quite able to categorize him/her.

In the next paragraph, some conclusions will be drawn from the previous discussion with regard to contemporary ethnographic research in tourism and the role of the researcher.

SHIFTING ROLES IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM RESEARCH: A CONCLUSION

From the above discussion of ethnographic research in the field of tourism it becomes clear that there are several parallels between tourism and ethnography; between tourists and ethnographers. Both are involved in travelling to other places, searching for a sense of disconnection from their daily lives to experience other cultures (Crick, 1995). In doing so they actively engage in the construction of boundaries between 'self' and 'other'.

However, the contemporary developments in the world have increasingly blurred such boundaries. In fact, it is argued that both in tourism and ethnographic research the differences between 'self' and 'other' are largely illusionary. Instead of disconnection from daily life, travellers are confronted with a high level of connectedness between home and away (Dolby, 2003). Ethnographic studies that aim to understand cultural phenomena can no longer be confined to a single locality, because culture is produced in several connected global localities (Marcus, 1995). With regard to tourism, the issues related to tourism can be understood only if one considers the multiple and dynamic processes that are related to the phenomenon. 'In terms of tourism there are a wide, and often complex, array of social settings and interactions to be studied' (Palmer, 2001, p. 310). These include interactions between hosts and guests at the local destination, among different groups of tourists, the role of the environment, but also the processes by which tourists are motivated to travel, the interactions across time and space between

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different actors in the industry and the way people are changed by and make sense of these interactions. The exotic is no longer an isolated location where the traveller is an odd factor. The exotic has come to be an image, an illusion where the traveller is just as much a part of the setting as the hosts. Thus, tourism researchers in their role of traveller are transformed from distant observers to legitimate insiders in the setting, thereby blurring the boundary between who is who and what is studied (Sherif, 2001). Yet the very fact that the researcher is so naturally accepted in the field has far-reaching consequences for their research. Although the adoption of the tourist role is convenient because it legitimates the presence in most tourism related settings, it is also constraining access to the backstage areas of the tourism arena. It is hard to get rid of the tourist role and to penetrate the local community.

One's role in a specific setting is the product of intersubjective understanding between all actors and the researcher should therefore be able to renegotiate his/her role in order to obtain access to different settings. This means that the researcher needs to be conscious about his or her position at all times. Adopting different roles according to the social setting is something that lies in the nature of human beings. It has been stated that our social reality is similar to a theatre and we are all actors, playing a part (Goffman, 1959). The role we play in a certain situation depends on the people we interact with, the purpose of the interaction, the context, etc. These roles are often closely linked to aspects of our identities. According to theories on identity, albeit social identity (i.e. Tajfel, 1978; Jenkins, 1996), organisational identity (i.e. Ashforth and Mael, 1989) or ethnic identity (i.e. Jenkins, 1997; Cohen, 2000), our behaviour in different situations depends on how we identify ourselves and are identified by others in that particular situation. Our membership of specific social groups defines who we are to others and to ourselves. Thus, identity is both situational and a dynamic concept that is 'subject to modulation according to circumstances' (Cohen, 2000, p. 3). In certain situations people tend to emphasise different aspects of their identities. According to these theorists, identity is often used strategically by people in order to secure their position within that particular situation.

Looking at the examples in this article, a similar process can be identified. The researchers are strategically employing different aspects of their identity through the adoption of their behaviour (role) according to the situation. However, for the researcher, the goal of this strategic identity is to obtain data, while in the case of ethnic identity the strategic use is generally aimed to strengthen a person or group's own political, social or economic position within the society. Nevertheless the process is comparable.

Researchers have to constantly think about which part of their identity they have to emphasise or hide, or about what they want and what is best for their research. Such choices often represent the position the researcher takes between different actors or groups. As became clear, researchers in the field of tourism (as well as in other contemporary fields) are increasingly connected to their field of inquiry, the boundaries between an 'emic' and 'etic' perspective seem to fade. Today it is hardly possible for an ethnographer to travel to an unknown and isolated culture and study every aspect of the daily life. Similarly, tourists will have a hard time finding 'authentic' tourist sites that can separate them completely from their day-to-day lives. Due to the interconnectedness of sites across the globe, and the increasing interactions among cultures, boundaries between 'home' and 'away' seem to disappear. 'Other' becomes 'normal'. The ethnographer is no longer an expert in exoticness or difference, because almost anyone can travel and interact with people and cultures all over the world. The role of the ethnographer becomes much more attached to the study of constructions of interconnectedness and cultural differentiation across multiple sites (Marcus, 1995; Dolby, 2003). It requires a reframing of ethnographic practices whereby attention is paid to the connections and relations among the different actors in a field and the way in which these relations are constructed. It involves high sensitivity to the intersubjective systems of meaning that are present and that shape the interactions in a social setting.

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